

I agree with the author of the article that the shelf lists of Colonial Office material at the PRO are very uninformative; they merely list the first and last number of the files in each box. It is left to the researcher to either decide from the registers which files are available and then to select those for examination, or to call for every box for a particular period and to go through each one in turn. In order to assist the researcher the Modern Records Department has started writing descriptive lists of the contents of each box, and to this end is inviting outside assistance and the FCO has taken the opportunity, provided by the change in the registration system, to introduce descriptive shelf listing for the post-1951 Colonial Office material.

HARRY HANNAM

### KENYA NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES BOARD

(Copy of form letter sent by the Board to some relevant institutions)

Kenya National Library Services Board,  
PO Box 30573, Nairobi, Kenya.

Tel: 27871/29186/338407

Cable: KENLIB

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: National Collection and Bibliographic Agency

We would like to draw your attention in this circular, to the existence of the newly created National Collection and Bibliographic Agency, an organ of the Kenya National Library Services Board. Already drawn-up as its broad priority objectives are two ambitious programmes.

First, the new body is going to be charged with the responsibility of gradually building a multimedia (books, research reports, annual reports, manuscripts, maps, microforms, films, film strips, globes, technical drawings, transparencies, machine-readable data files, sound recordings, video recordings, music, slides, multimedia kits, models etc) national collection of all recorded knowledge/information on or of interest to Kenya, for purposes of research, reference and preservation for posterity. These materials must have been published/produced IN Kenya; authored BY Kenyans; and written ABOUT Kenya. Please note that, a publication/production needs only to meet ANY ONE of these three conditions, and NOT all of them at the same time! A recent survey conducted by this agency indicates that your organization/institution publishes/produces a few of the information containers enumerated above.

Secondly, the agency will also undertake the preparation and publication of an authoritative national bibliography, both current and retrospective. The advantages to accrue out of this exercise in terms of promotion of research, improved accessibility/wide circulation of Kenya's publications need no repetition here.

The agency's broad goals, as stated above, are indeed ambitious. Positive results in these undertakings cannot be realised without the co-operation and co-ordination among all relevant organizations. Publishing concerns such as commercial publishing houses, a few government agencies, research organizations, institutions of higher learning, a number of libraries, learned societies/associations, corporations etc, will definitely have specific roles to play in this venture, in order to make it a success.

The following are the agency's priority areas where your organization's support would be vital:

- Our priority at the moment is the first annual of the Kenya National Bibliography. This will list material produced between "JANUARY-DECEMBER 1980". We would, therefore, appreciate it very much if you could send us hard copies or detailed bibliographical data of all the materials published/produced by your firm/institution in that year.

- The agency's next concern will be retrospective acquisition and compilation of the Kenya National Bibliography for publications/productions ON Kenya, BY Kenyans, and ABOUT Kenya. Here again, a given publication/production needs only to meet ANY ONE of these three conditions. Your organization's complete and current catalogues for its publications/productions to-date will be of great interest to us.
- We would also like to know all serials/periodicals (monthlies, bi-monthlies, quarterlies, weeklies, dailies, annuals etc) your organization may have published before (including cessations), and those that you continue to publish today.
- Finally, we would like to request that our agency be included in your current mailing list. This would enable us to follow your publishing/production activities more closely in future. To speed up the work in the preparation of our second annual, for example, we would need right away, your schedule listing materials intended for release between JANUARY-DECEMBER 1981.

Please contact us on any questions you may have regarding the propositions outlined above.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

Francis W Ochola  
for: CHIEF LIBRARIAN

#### BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

AL-FIHRIST: quarterly review specializing in documentation and bibliography. Vol.1, Beirut, Michel Naufal, 1981. 426pp.

The publishers of Al-Fihrist have the laudable aim of making a contribution to a field notoriously difficult in Arabic studies, that of current awareness. They present this new publication as an Arabic language "work instrument for... facilitating the efforts of researchers or others concerned with the affairs of the Arab world". By abstracting articles from a number of major Arabic periodicals from 1981 onwards, the editors attempt to "classify, categorize and present the intellectual produce of that world". For this rather ambitious goal they choose 66 periodicals from which to glean their information, which ranges in subject matter from the economics of oil to belles-lettres, and from the markets of the Gulf to the philosophy of Islam.

The layout of Al-Fihrist is very clear. A short introduction is followed by a detailed guide to its use, which includes an easily understood diagrammatic key.

The main corpus of the book follows, with two alphabetical sequences of subject and author. The indexing and cross-referencing are of a high standard.

Of the periodicals chosen, by far the largest group, some thirty, are published in the Lebanon. This preponderance of Lebanese material is to be expected, as is the inclusion, in lesser numbers, of periodicals from, for example, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. What is far from satisfactory is the fact that the editors have chosen to abstract from only one Egyptian publication. And even their choice of that one - Al-Siyāsa al-Duwaliyya - seems rather arbitrary. The inclusion in future of the major Egyptian periodicals would certainly obviate the major criticism to be levelled against Al-Fihrist. The other criticism is the cost of the publication - an annual subscription rate for institutions outside the Arab world of \$200 may well militate against its success.

If Al-Fihrist were to fail it would be a great pity; in spite of some limitations in scope, it is a very useful publication covering many of the periodicals that are available for consultation in Britain.

FRANCES M ABERCROMBY